

Remarks by Robert G. Rapson, Charge d’Affaires ad Interim
US Embassy, Kuala Lumpur
At the Opening of the
TRAFFIC/ASEAN-WEN Judiciary Workshop on Wildlife Crime and Prosecution
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Secretary General Dato’ Zoal Azha Bin Yusof, distinguished speakers and guests. I would like to recognize and thank the organizers and participants of this US-Malaysian judiciary workshop. This workshop represents one of many cooperative programs our two countries are undertaking as part of our regional efforts to combat illegal trade in protected plants and animals. Moreover, the workshop is proof of our common commitment to preserving our shared natural heritage and biodiversity.

According to a 2008 U.S. Congressional Report, illegal trade in wildlife continues to grow at an alarming rate, and may be as high as \$20 billion annually. Obviously this growing trade reflects a rise in both supply and demand. We are pleased to be working collaboratively with Malaysia and others in the region to eliminate this pernicious activity.

The countries that have joined ASEAN-WEN, including Malaysia, understand the importance of this initiative. The Malaysian government has demonstrated its commitment to fighting the organized poaching and trafficking of flora and fauna. It hosted an ASEAN-wide Task Force and workshop in Kuching last July, and is supporting this Judiciary Workshop on Wildlife Crime and Prosecution. The United States applauds Malaysia’s recognition of the threat wildlife crime poses and its willingness to take the necessary steps to combat the growing wildlife trafficking network.

As some of you may know, the US is one of the top three destinations in the world for illegally trafficked wildlife products. Most recently, the U.S. government has undertaken measures to strengthen its legal framework to prevent illegal wildlife trade through the Amended “Lacey Act.” First enacted in 1900, the Lacey Act is the oldest wildlife protection statute in the United States. The 2008 amendments to the Lacey Act make it unlawful to import, export, transport, sell, or purchase any plant taken or traded in violation of the laws of a U.S. state, as well as most foreign laws. The amended Lacey Act will be phased-in starting April 1, 2009. To prepare for the Act’s implementation, the US has sent officials and experts to various wildlife exporting countries, including to Malaysia, to explain the Act and its implications.

We are fortunate that one of the US’s foremost legal experts on environmental crimes is with us today for this workshop. Department of Justice Senior Trial Attorney Robert Anderson, who has written and lectured widely on the subject of environmental law enforcement, will share his experiences in combating wildlife trafficking over the next two days.

While we all recognize that wildlife trafficking is a global issue, its impact is most felt at the local level. Once endangered animals such as tigers, pangolins, monkeys and birds disappear, along with wild orchids and other rare plants, they are gone forever and can never be replaced. Given the extensive biodiversity in Malaysia and throughout Southeast Asia, wildlife trafficking threatens to cause irrevocable damage to this region's delicate ecosystems if a concerted and collective effort is not made to stop it.

I would like to take this moment to acknowledge the excellent work of TRAFFIC, with whose help a number of recommendations under the ASEAN-WEN Strategic Plan are now being implemented across the region. These include special interagency cross-border enforcement meetings, training courses for enforcement agencies, and special training for the judiciary.

The U.S. recognizes that combating wildlife crimes is not the purview of any one country, but requires the collective effort of all countries. Together, we can combine our knowledge, resources, and expertise to make a real difference. The goal of ASEAN-WEN is an ambitious one, but certainly not an impossible one. While it will take a great deal of hard work, with the commitment and support of individuals, NGO's and governments, it is a goal that is readily achievable.

In conclusion, I want to express again the strong support of the U.S. Government for the ASEAN-WEN initiative. We are very proud to be associated with this activity. I would like to thank the organizers, in particular Chief Registrar of the Federal Courts of Malaysia, Puan Hasnah, for her support for this workshop. I would also like to thank the ASEAN-WEN Program Coordination Unit and Support Program, as well as the resource speakers from the various government agencies who have made great efforts to make this workshop possible.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to all of the judges represented here. You are the final line of defense for the wild animals and plants that are increasingly impacted by this illegal trade. With your commitment and that of your colleagues elsewhere in the judiciary and law enforcement community, we can send a firm and clear message to wildlife traffickers – that trafficking will not be tolerated.

I wish you all a very successful workshop and we look forward to seeing the fruits of your efforts in the coming months and years. Thank you.